

# Wildlife at risk from dwindling rivers, says WWF

Ben Webster, Environment Editor

June 24 2017, 12:01am, The Times



The River Itchen in Hampshire is being harmed by over-abstraction by Southern Water, the charity says

ALAMY

Share



Save



Kingfishers, water vole, trout and other wildlife populations are under threat because water companies and farmers are draining dozens of rivers.

Too much is being taken from 550 bodies of water in England and Wales, an analysis shows, including some of the finest chalk streams where flow has been reduced to a trickle.

The problem has become acute because Britain has experienced its driest winter and early spring for more than 20 years, the WWF says. The charity accuses water companies of seeking cheap sources of clean water, extracting it from rivers rather than investing in

treatment systems and fixing leaks.

Environment Agency figures reveal that 42 per cent of England's chalk streams are below their environmental limit, meaning wildlife is threatened.



Kingfishers are among a number of species being threatened by the draining of more than 500 bodies of water in England and Wales

ALAMY

Chalk streams have naturally filtered water from springs and are havens for kingfishers, otters, and rare species such as the southern damselfly.

The Itchen in Hampshire is being harmed by over-abstraction by Southern Water, the WWF said. Bevern stream, a tributary of the Ouse in Sussex, was deep enough to swim in 20 years ago but can now be walked across all year round.

Peter King, project officer for the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, said abstraction by farmers and landowners had increased in the past five years. "Those who visit for canoeing, wildlife and fishing are not visiting anymore. Angling clubs have seen a 50 per cent decline in memberships. We have also seen a strong decrease in pike and carp."

Water voles are particularly threatened by low rivers because they are more vulnerable to predators. Their numbers have declined by 90 per cent since the 1970s.

Most abstraction rights date back to the 1963 Water Act, which gave no regard to the environment. A white paper in 2011, Water for Life, promised new legislation for England and Wales. However, in April the government said there would be an indefinite delay in introducing a water bill, citing time limitations owing to Brexit.

Four out of five people believe wildlife has as much right to water as people, according to a survey commissioned by the WWF. More than two thirds said the government should restrict the water taken from rivers.

The WWF said Ofwat should require water companies to develop “smarter tariffs”, charging households more during droughts to encourage water saving. However, only half of homes have water meters and most of those cannot handle variable charging.

---

Share



Save

---

## Related links



NATURE NOTEBOOK

### Mini-suns to brighten up our lives and lawns

Jonathan Tulloch

Who declared war on dandelions? When did we begin persecuting this valuable if not essential link in our ecosystem?

June 24 2017

---

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed [here](#).

5 comments

Newest | Oldest | Most Recommended

---

[Steve Skeptic](#) Jun 24, 2017

What can we expect when we allow 4 million migrants to move here in just a few short years. It's not only housing, education and the NHS that suffer. We are killing paradise.

---

3 Recommend Reply

---

[Yn Wridog dros dy Anrhydedd](#) Jun 24, 2017

Without water, we will be without anything.

---

4 Recommend Reply

---

[DoINotLikeThat](#) Jun 24, 2017

Yet another bit of legislation stalled by Brexit. I hope all those rural Leavers are happy.

---

Recommend Reply

---

[Steve Skeptic](#) Jun 24, 2017

It's you lot and your open door policy that are responsible. Why can you all not see it?

---

3 Recommend Reply

---

[Antonia](#) Jun 24, 2017

A while ago I read somewhere that there is plenty of natural unspoiled underground water that be extracted by water companies.

---

1 Recommend Reply

---

**livefyre** 

You are logged in as a registered user

[□ BACK TO TOP](#)

**THE  TIMES**

---

## GET IN TOUCH

---

[Contact us](#)

[Help](#)

[The Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[Place an announcement](#)

[Classified advertising](#)

[Display advertising](#)

[The Times corrections](#)

[The Sunday Times corrections](#)

---

## MORE FROM THE TIMES AND THE SUNDAY TIMES

---

[The Times e-paper](#)

[The Sunday Times e-paper](#)

[Times Currency Services](#)

[The Sunday Times Wine Club](#)

[Encounters Dating](#)

[Times Print Gallery](#)

[Times Crossword Club](#)

[Sunday Times Driving](#)

[Times+](#)

[The Sunday Times Rich List](#)

[Insider City Guides](#)

[Good University Guide](#)

[Parent Power](#)

[The Brief](#)

---

© Times Newspapers Limited 2017. Registered in England No. 894646. Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.

[Privacy & cookie policy](#)

[Syndication](#)

[Commissioning Terms](#)

[Terms and conditions](#)